DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 959 IR 014 582

AUTHOR Zvacek, Susan M.
TITLE Distance Education in the Teacher Education Program of Zimbabwe.
PUB DATE Feb 90
NOTE 10p.; In: Proceedings of Selected Paper Presentations at the Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology; see IR 014 535.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Developing Nations; *Distance Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Models; Systems Approach; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS Diffusion of Innovations Model; *Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

A research project was conducted to develop a narrative description of the strengths and weaknesses of the distance education component of the Zimbabwean teacher education program. The Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education (TPMDE), which resulted from the study's emergent design, combines three theoretical perspectives on education: systems theory; curriculum development theory; and adoption and diffusion of innovations theory. Major program strengths, identified using the TPMDE as a framework, are: (1) the strength of the conviction among Zimbabwe's educational community that distance education is a worthwhile venture; (2) the persistence of those involved in the program; (3) Ministry of Education advocacy; (4) quality of personnel involved in the program; and (5) quality of students at the teachers' colleges. Major weaknesses were: (1) the lack of a Zimbabwean model for distance education; (2) ineffective communication; (3) lack of accountability; (4) insufficient quantities of trained personnel; and (5) lack of instructor-student feedback procedures. Recommendations based on the comprehensive description of the program's distance education component included establishing a Distance Education Commission, providing for program evaluation on a regular basis, encouraging a more active role for the University of Zimbabwe, and establishing a distance education department at each teachers' college in the country. (5 references) (GL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED323959

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Title:

Distance Education in the Teacher Education Program of Zimbabwe

Author:

Susan M. Zvacek

IR014582

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael Simonson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction

A research project, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, was designed and conducted to study the distance education component of the Zimbabwean teacher education program. During this study, in which the research design evolved during the project, a model combing three theoretical perspectives on education was developed by the author. This model, the Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education, integrates Systems Theory, Curriculum Development Theory, and Adoption and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. By using the model as a guide, a comprehensive description of the program was created, the strengths and weaknesses of the program were identified, and recommendations for program improvement were presented.

Zimbabwean Teacher Education

Background

Zimbabwe's current educational structure is a result of the shift from British colonial rule to independence in April, 1980. Prior to that time, public education was divided along racial lines, and schools were strictly segregated. The educational system was a way of "establishing and maintaining the social and economic differences between the black majority and the white minority" (Kadhani & Riddell, 1981, p.58).

Political upheaval eventually brought about major changes in the country's educational priorities. Upon independence, Zimbabwe was in a position to offer educational opportunity to all of its citizens, regardless of color. Unfortunately, the radical changes brought about by a new political philosophy could not be immediately assimilated and a "crisis of expectation" assaulted the schools. Enrollments increased dramatically, challenging the resourcefulness and ingenuity of Zimbabwean educators. Between 1979 (pre-independence) and 1984 there was a 262% increase in the number of students enrolled in primary schools. The expansion at the secondary level was even greater. Between 1979 and 1984, secondary enrollments increased by 638% (Chivore, 1986).

The number of professionally-qualified teachers employed in the Zimbabwean educational system could not begin to meet the need. In 1985, over 66% of the secondary school teachers were untrained or underqualified, and the situation was considered "critical" at the primary level, as well (Chivore, 1986). This shortage of qualified teachers led to major changes in the teacher education program.

Teacher Education in Zimbabwe

The original, pre-independence model for teacher education was quite similar to the traditional American

model. Students attended a specialized Teachers' College for training, of which there are now fourteen in Zimbabwe. Teacher education consisted of a three-year campus-based program that included periods of "teaching practice" (similar to student teaching) with increasing classroom responsibilities over time, under the direct supervision of a full-time classroom teacher.

This model was altered in response to the teacher shortage that occurred after independence was achieved. The student's responsibilities while on teaching practice (T.P.) increased, as did the amount of time spent on the T.P. assignment. The current model, adopted in 1988, includes one year of on-campus instruction, one year of teaching practice (during which the teacher education students shoulder the responsibilities of full-time teaching), and the final year back on campus.

Another model of teacher education was created within the Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC). Four ZINTEC colleges were built shortly after independence specifically to alleviate the teacher shortage crisis by putting large numbers of teachers into classrooms after a short, intensive training period. The ZINTEC model, as it now exists, is a four-year program with two terms (four months each) of on-campus instruction, followed by eight terms of T.P., concluding with two terms on campus.

Distance Education and the Teacher Education Program

Distance education was incorporated into the teacher education program so that students on teaching practice assignments could continue their academic progress. The program has been predominantly print-based, utilizing self-contained "modules" for instruction. The students work from these learning packages and return assignments when visiting the campus for seminars or at the end of their T.P. assignment.

The modules are prepared by a central agency, the Distance Education Centre, with assistance from teachers' college faculty who are released on "sabbatical" to act as subject matter specialists. Because academic resources are often scarce in the outlying rural areas where many students are assigned to teaching practice, the learning packages contain the necessary reading materials and emphasize projects that can be completed with locally-available supplies.

Studying the Distance Education Program

A research project was designed with the purpose of developing a narrative description of the Zimbabwean distance education program's strengths and weaknesses. Recommendations for further development would then be drawn from these results.

With the assistance of a grant from the United States Information Agency, through its Teachers/Texts/Technology program, two trips were made to Zimbabwe by the author to observe the distance education program. In addition to observation, interviews were conducted and questionnaires distributed to assess the role and status of distance education in the teacher education program.

Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education

As in many qualitative studies, an "emergent research design" began to evolve as the project progressed. A model, developed from three theory bases, was created by the author to facilitate the comprehensive description of the distance education program. These theoretical perspectives were the foundation for the study and included Tyler's Curriculum Development theory (1949), Banathy's Systems theory (1973), and Rogers' theory of Adoption and Diffusion of Innovations (1983).

The core ideas within each of the three theory bases were incorporated into an integrated model, the Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education (TPMDE). (See Figure 1.) Each theory base represents a vertical column within the model. Curriculum Development is on the left, Adoption and Diffusion of Innovations is on the right, and Systems theory is in the middle (or "back", if visualized three-dimensionally). Each horizontal level of the model represents a frame of reference drawn from the relationships among the three theories. The uppermost level is "Environment;" the second is "Structure;" the third, "Process;" and the final level is "Evaluation." These four levels were the source of research questions that guided the descriptive analysis of the distance education program.

Some examples of research questions that grew out of the "Environment" level of the model included:

- What are Zimbabwe's educational needs?
- What relationships exist between the program and the environment?
- What are the goals and objectives of the distance education program?

The second plane of reference focused on the distance education program and its content and internal structure. Research questions included:

- What components constitute the distance education program?
- What are the functions of the various components?
- Are the components and functions working together to move the program toward its goals?

The "Process" level of the model was concerned with the behavior of the program over time and transformations

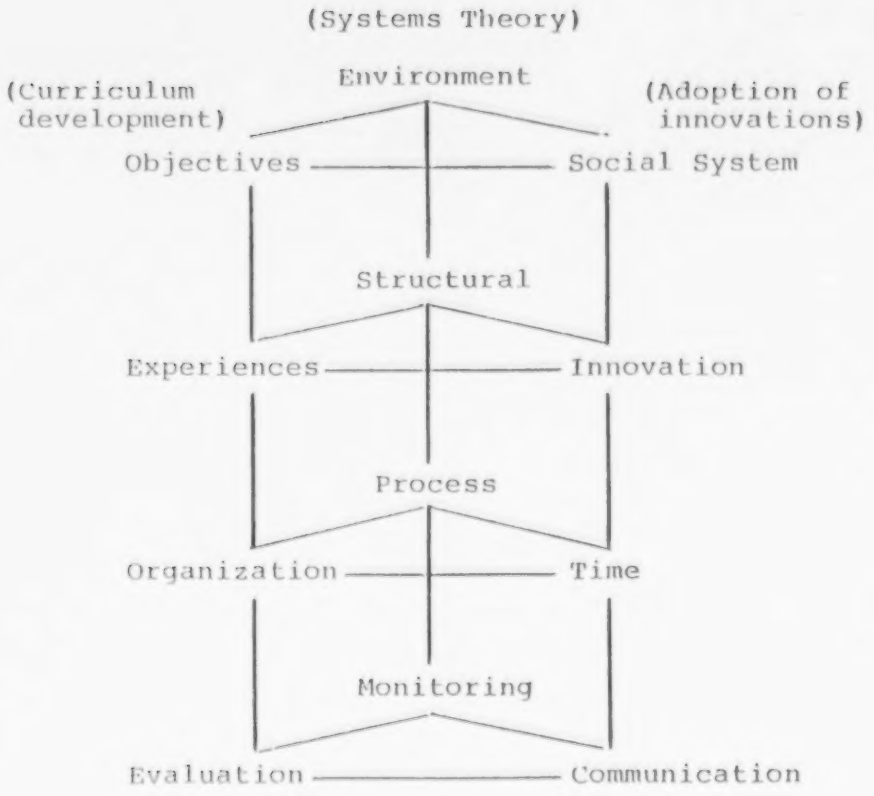

Figure 1. Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education (TPMDE)

that could affect the overall organization of program operations. Some research questions from this level were:

- How has the distance education program changed over time?
- How could purposeful change be introduced into the system?

The final level of the TPMDE, "Evaluation," is dependent upon the communication channels available among the system's components and also those supporting the system within its environmental context. The monitoring and regulatory capacity of the program was studied by asking:

- What communication channels are necessary for the successful functioning of the program?
- Is there a clearly identified process for program monitoring within the distance education program structure?

The flexibility of this integrated model allows the researcher to generate research questions related to a specific program, or to design a new program based on identified needs. In this study, a comprehensive description of the distance education component of the Zimbabwean teacher education program was created. The major strengths and weaknesses of the program were identified and recommendations for further development were given.

Strengths and Weakness of the Distance Education Program

There were five major strengths identified during this study. These were: purpose, history, Ministry advocacy, personnel, and students.

"Purpose" refers to the strength of the conviction within Zimbabwe's educational community that distance education was worthwhile and important to the success of the teacher education program. Initiated in response to a national crisis -- teacher shortage -- there was a minimum of resistance to this innovation.

The second strength identified was the program's persistence. Faculty members in the teachers' colleges were comfortable with the concept of distance education for instructional delivery. Distance education had historical precedent in several African nations and was considered a viable mode of instruction.

Ministry advocacy of the distance education component was the third program strength. As the administrative entity over the teachers' colleges, Ministry of Education support potentially could be translated into budgetary and personnel assistance. By recognizing the distance education component as a vital part of the teacher education program, official Ministry sanction also provided political endorsement for its continued existence.

The fourth strength identified was the quality of personnel involved in the program. The theoretical grounding and academic preparedness of these educators created a strong talent pool at each teachers' college. Although working under circumstances that might appear unreasonable in the United States (very large classes, few resources, etc.), lecturers spoke positively of their role in the educational system.

The quality of the students at the teachers' colleges was the fifth major program strength. Because there were many more applicants than program openings, the colleges were able to select students of high calibre that were most likely to complete the program successfully. These students were described by their instructors as highly motivated and dedicated, and those encountered by the author appeared articulate and mature.

The primary weaknesses of the program included the lack of a "Zimbabwean Model" for distance education, ineffective communication, lack of accountability, insufficient quantities of trained personnel, and lack of instructor/student feedback procedures. Each of these weaknesses was identified by using the TPMDE.

The lack of a unified model for distance education in the Zimbabwean teacher education program contributed to a lack of focus. Without uniformity of purpose, the distance education activities across colleges (and, in some cases, within colleges) were designed to achieve differing aims. This, in turn, led to inconsistency in programming and lack of equivalency across programs.

Lack of effective communication channels, the second major weakness, resulted partially from the lack of a unified model. Although some of the difficulty in communicating could be attributed to logistical barriers (e.g., poor telephone and postal service), much of the problem could be attributed to the system itself. Without an established structure to support the open exchange of ideas and information, channels of communication are unlikely to develop spontaneously.

The third weakness, lack of accountability, could also be related to the lack of a unified structure within the program. Because the distance education activities at each college were managed by individual departments, there was no centralized system in place to monitor the overall progress of the students. This made it difficult to substantiate the value of the program and undermined the credibility of its goals.

Although the program's personnel was considered a major strength, there were simply not enough of them -- a weakness that was consistent across all levels of the educational system. Lecturers and administrators who were on the job became overworked and were unable to provide as

much individual attention to students as they would have preferred.

The fifth weakness -- lack of timely feedback to students -- had severe ramifications. Distance education projects and assignments had sometimes remained unmarked for weeks (or even months) and students were unaware of their progress. Instructionally, this was the program's most critical flaw, and understaffing and logistical barriers to interaction had aggravated the problem.

Program Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive description of the distance education component, a set of program recommendations was developed. These were:

- Establish a Distance Education Commission;
- Conduct program evaluations on a regular basis;
- Re-focus the distance education modules toward applied education;
- Encourage a more active role for the University of Zimbabwe; and
- Establish a Distance Education Department at each teachers' college.

Establishing a Distance Education Commission, to be convened by the Ministry of Education, would enhance the credibility of the program and increase the communication among the parties involved. This commission would serve predominantly in a consultative role and would make recommendations for program improvements based on the commissioners' collective expertise.

Conducting program evaluations on a regularly-scheduled basis was the second recommendation. These rigorous, objective evaluations could examine the cost effectiveness of the program, attitudes of students, perceptions of lecturers and administrators, quality of materials, and student achievement. Collecting program information regularly creates a base of research data that could be used to make long-term planning decisions and help to allocate limited resources efficiently.

The third recommendation was to modify the focus of the distance education modules, emphasizing applied education topics and practical aspects of teaching. This would enable the students on T.P. to utilize their classrooms for assignments directly tied to their daily activities. Another potential benefit of this modification would be improved teaching by the T.P. students and a stronger link between the theoretical topics covered in on-campus instruction and the practical realities of the classroom.

Increasing the University of Zimbabwe's involvement in the distance education program was the fourth recommendation. As the overseeing institution for teacher certification, a stronger leadership position was

suggested. Some possible activities related to this would be offering courses about distance education for college credit, seeking out external funding sources for upgrading the distance education program, and consulting with individual teachers' colleges regarding research projects.

The fifth recommendation was to establish a Distance Education Department at each teachers' college. By centralizing operations in this way, program accountability would be facilitated and consistency across programs enhanced. Communication throughout the system would also be improved because there would be one individual at each institution that could "speak for the program."

Summary

By using the Triad Perspective Model of Distance Education as a descriptive tool, the distance education component of the teacher education program of Zimbabwe was studied. A comprehensive narrative detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the distance education activities was created with recommendations for further improvement. As educational access becomes increasingly important to traditional educational institutions, the role of distance education will expand. To this end, a solid research foundation must be created to guide decision-making for long term success.

References

Banathy, B. H. (1973). *Developing a systems view of education: The systems-model approach*. Belmont, CA: Fearon Publishers.

Chivore, B. R. S. (1986). Teacher education in post-independent Zimbabwe: Problems and possible solutions. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 12* (3), 205-227.

Kadhani, M. & Riddell, R. (1981). Education. In C. Stoneman (Ed.), *Zimbabwe's inheritance* (pp. 58-73). London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Rogers, E. M. (1983). *Diffusion of innovations* (3rd ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.